



Aruban Archeologists welcome back artifacts from Netherlands Antilles

On Wednesday morning, Raymundo Dijkhoff, head archeologist of the Aruba Historical Museum displayed a small portion of a collection of “prehistoric” artifacts that have been returned to island historians by Drs. Iteke Witteveen, director of the National Archeological and Anthropology Museum of the Netherlands Antilles. The selection of “prehistoric” pieces weigh over sixty-five kilos and encompass several pieces from the time of the Caiquatio Indians, approximately 500 to 1500 A.D., before the recorded history of Aruba.

The returned artifacts are part of a collection that has been on display in Holland, at the Rijksmuseum Museum in Leiden. Originally recovered during a number of digs by archeologists from Holland in 1923, 1960, and 1970, they became part of the Leiden collection, as Aruba had no museum or artifacts department of their own during that time.

The museum in Curacao received the pieces for their collection in 1983, and the present Director, Drs. Witteveen, offered to return them to Aruba when she took over administration of the museum in 2002. Staff of the Aruba Archeological Museum, including Director Arminda Ruiz, were very happy to received the set of artifacts as a new and enlarged museum in Oranjestad was in the planning stages. Raymundo Dijkhoff and Harold Kelly, assisted by Hiram Angela traveled to Curacao to inventory and assess the works, and to bring them home. They will be on display when the new museum is completed in 2008.

Frank Croes, the Director of the Instituto di Cultura joined Drs. Witteveen and Raymundo to for the official return, and in particular, to make a request to the public to help Aruba recover their history. At this time, Aruban archeologists and museum staff are engaged in attempting to find and retrieve many artifacts that have been removed from the island over the years, quite a few by tourists as “souvenirs.” This is a common problem for many countries, and archeologists and historians wishing to catalogue and display their heritage properly in museums. Dr. Witteveen brought forward the point that the government should assist in this task by passing laws to protect the historic and cultural heritage, particularly where new construction is concern. Potential archeological digs should be preserved by not allowing the bulldozing of a site or the pouring of foundations until qualified museum personnel have investigated and assessed if it is home to artifacts of archeological importance.

Mr. Croes and Mr. Dijkhoff offered their sincere gratitude on behalf of the museum and the Aruban people for the return of this bit of history, and voiced their agreement with Dr. Witteveen on the necessity of protecting and preserving it to educate both Arubans and island visitors for generations to come.